

VIRGINIA MILITARY ADVISORY COUNCIL 2012 ANNUAL REPORT



**Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs
& Homeland Security**

Preface: The Virginia Military Advisory Council was created by the *Code of Virginia* through §2.2-2666.1. The legislation requires an annual executive summary of interim activity and work of the Council to be submitted to the Governor and General Assembly.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Virginia Military Advisory Council (VMAC) was created as an advisory council to maintain a cooperative and constructive relationship between the Commonwealth and the leadership of the Armed Forces of the United States and the military commanders of such Armed Forces stationed in the Commonwealth, and to encourage regular communication on continued military facility viability, the exploration of privatization opportunities and issues affecting preparedness, public safety, and security.

The VMAC is composed of thirty-two (32) members representing military, legislators, private partners, and executive leadership from the Commonwealth. The Chairman is selected by the Council among its membership. The House of Delegates and Virginia Senate each appointed new members to serve on the VMAC during 2012. As a result of changes in the normal rotation of installation commanders, seven new members joined the VMAC in 2012. The Council added one legislative position and six military positions during 2012. These positions were:

Chair, Military Caucus, Virginia General Assembly
Commandant, Naval District Washington
Commander, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth
Commander, Norfolk Naval Shipyard
Commander, Naval Station Norfolk
Commander, Naval Support Activity Hampton Roads
Commander, Norfolk District, US Army Corps of Engineers

The Council has two subcommittees, Quality of Life and Oceana/Fentress Advisory Council, which focus on major issues pertaining to the military. The Military – Civil Mutual Aid, which was created two years ago, was inactivated upon fulfilling its purpose.

Rear Admiral Townsend (Tim) G. Alexander, Commander, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic, continued to serve as the Chairman during 2012. Through his leadership, overall involvement by the commanders within the Commonwealth increased during the past year. This allowed for the Commonwealth to address several distinct and important issues which will be commented on in this report.

This year, the Council dedicated one of its meetings to giving installation commanders an opportunity to provide a status report on their installation as well as identify any issues which the Commonwealth may be able to address in order to better support the military. The commanders identified thirty-seven (37) unique issues for consideration. A total of eight (8) issues have been addressed throughout the year and ten (10) issues remain on the Council's agenda to be taken up in the future. The remaining issues are beyond the scope of the VMAC. Periodic updates are provided to the commanders during subsequent meetings.

Quality of Life Subcommittee:

The Secretary of Defense annually distributes a list of Ten Key Quality of Life Issues Supporting Service Members and Families. These issues surrounding quality of life and family well-being can best be addressed by states. The Department of Defense-State Liaison Office (DSLO) has worked with the VMAC to educate state policymakers, and other state leaders, about the needs of military members and their families. The overarching goal is to work together to remove unnecessary barriers, and significantly improve the quality of life for military families.

Although Virginia is a leader among the states on quality of life initiatives to support the military, we continue to work on several of the Secretary of Defense's key issues. During the 2012 General Assembly session, the VMAC supported the following approved legislation to continue to improve the quality of life for the military community.

Hiring Preference for Surviving Spouses and Children of Veterans - Adds the surviving spouse or child of a veteran killed in the line of duty to the preference in state employment for veterans.

Expediting the issuance of licenses for spouses of military service members - Requires expedited issuance of business licenses, permits, certificates, or other required business documents to military spouses who are relocated with their spouse in the military and possess those documents in other jurisdictions.

Military Training for Commercial Driver's Licenses - Requires the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles to consider, to the extent not inconsistent with federal law, applicants' military training and experience in assessing their eligibility to receive a Virginia commercial driver's license.

Ensure Ballot Access for Overseas Uniformed Military - Adopts the Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act, with modifications, to promote uniformity of treatment and improved administration of election laws for military and overseas voters.

Higher Education Policies for Active Duty Military - Requires the governing boards of each public institution of higher education, in accordance with guidelines developed by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, to implement policies that recognize the scheduling difficulties and obligations of active duty military personnel.

Military Education for Higher Education Credit - Requires the governing boards of each public institution of higher education, in accordance with guidelines developed by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, to implement policies that award academic credit to students for educational experience gained from military service.

Expiration of Driver's License for Active Duty Military - Extends the grace period for driver's license expiration from 90 to 180 days after the return from service outside the United States of active duty military personnel, a member of the diplomatic service, or a civilian employee of the U.S. government or a federal agency or contractor.

Flags to be Flown at Half Staff - Provides that whenever a member of the United States armed forces, Virginia National Guard, Virginia Defense Force, a police officer, a firefighter, or an emergency medical services provider who is a resident of Virginia is killed in the line of duty, state and local flags flown at any building owned by the Commonwealth shall be flown at half staff or mast for one day to honor and acknowledge respect for those who made the supreme sacrifice.

Hiring Preference for Virginia National Guard - Establishes a preference in state hiring for members of the Virginia National Guard. Under the bill, when a member of the Virginia National Guard applies for a position or job classification requiring an assessment using numerical ratings, points equal to five percent of the total points available from the assessment device or devices shall be added to the member's passing score.

Free Lifetime Hunting and Fishing Licenses for Disabled Veterans - Allows a veteran who is permanently disabled due to a service-connected disability to obtain at no cost a combined hunting and freshwater fishing lifetime license, or a separate hunting or freshwater fishing lifetime license.

Implementation of Real Property Tax Exemptions for Disabled Veterans - Requires the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services to promulgate rules and regulations for the administration and implementation of the real property tax exemption for disabled veterans.

Application of Real Property Tax Exemption for Disabled Veterans - Provides that the real property tax exemption for disabled veterans for property acquired after January 1, 2011, begins on the date of acquisition and that the previous owner of the property is entitled to a pro rata refund of any taxes paid for any period of the tax year coming after the date of acquisition. The bill also provides that a veteran or spouse otherwise qualified for the exemption does not lose the exemption solely because of extended stays at hospitals, nursing homes, or other convalescent facilities as long as the real property is not leased to another person.

Application of Real Property Tax Exemptions for Disabled Veterans - Provides that the real property tax exemption for veterans whose disability rating occurs after January 1, 2011, begins on the date of the rating.

Application of Real Property Tax Exemptions for Disabled Veterans - Provides that the real property tax exemption for a veteran applies when the property is held in certain trusts, including for surviving spouses.

Honorable Burial for Unclaimed Veteran Remains - Provides for a funeral director to provide the names and any other identifying information on unclaimed remains to the Department of Veterans Services in order for the Department to determine if the unclaimed remains are those of a veteran. Under the bill, commencing July 1, 2014, the Department shall notify the funeral director within 30 days of receipt of the information if the remains are those of a veteran and whether such veteran is eligible for burial in a veteran's cemetery.

Improved Ratio of Veterans to Claims Agents - Changes the ratio of veterans to claims agents at the Department of Veteran Services from 26,212:1 to 23,000:1.

Board of Veterans Services Voting Members - Grants full voting privileges to ex-officio members of the Board of Veterans Services, including the Chairman of the Joint Leadership Council and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Veterans Services Foundation.

Quality of Life:

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security hosted two Military Roundtable meetings to address quality of life issues; one at Naval Station Norfolk and one at Fort Lee. Military personnel, family members, and representatives from various family support activities were invited to each meeting to be briefed on current initiatives with the Commonwealth and to talk one-on-one about issues they may have or steps Virginia can take to continue to address the quality of life for the military.

One specific issue that was addressed by both the commanders and during the roundtable discussions was the need for the Commonwealth to address the significance of the military Transition Assistance Program (TAP). This military program is designed to meet the needs of separating service members during their period of transition into civilian life by offering job-search assistance, health and education benefit services and a variety of other related services. The Commonwealth has identified the need to develop a “post” TAP program to offer to veterans after their discharge from the military. The purpose of this program will be to provide refresher information and Virginia specific support services to those recently or not so recently discharged service members. This year the Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security secured a grant to establish a temporary position at the Department of Veterans Services to work with the military services, state agencies and various nongovernmental organizations to define the gaps and make recommendations for what will become the Virginia post TAP program.

Oceana/Fentress Advisory Council:

The Oceana/Fentress Advisory Council met in July of 2012 to provide an update to all Council members and to receive a progress report from the cities of Chesapeake and Virginia Beach. Both cities continue to demonstrate strong support for Oceana Naval Air Station and are taking steps to continue addressing encroachment.

The Council recognizes the importance of the military missions to the Virginia economy and strongly encourages the VMAC to continue to educate Virginia leaders of such.

Other Activities:

- 1) The Governor hosted the third annual reception for members of the VMAC and Senior Commanders, or civilian equivalents, to express the gratitude the Commonwealth has for the military community.
- 2) The VMAC Vice-Chair Secretary Suit and the Secretary’s staff have participated in approximately fifty (50) official events at military installations which vary from office calls

with senior military leaders to attendance at official meetings or events. These visits reinforce the constructive relationships which have developed over the years between the Commonwealth and the military community. The VMAC looks forward to continuing its good work with the military on issues supporting the men and woman who serve our country.

- 3) During the scheduled VMAC meetings, there were presentations on a variety of subjects beneficial to the installations such as:
 - a. A presentation by the Department of Health on the *Coordinated Medical Surge and Countermeasure Distribution*. The purpose of the briefing was to inform the installation commanders on the role the Department of Health plays in providing medicines from the strategic national stockpile to all citizens of the Commonwealth including the military.
 - b. A briefing by “*Your Yeoman*” which is a support service for deployed service members. Services include card and gift shopping for loved ones, bill pay service, weekly home check-in service, care packages, emergency contact service and P.O. Box Service.
 - c. The Commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) made a presentation on services the DMV provides within the Commonwealth to military and veterans. The “Troops to Trucks” Program is a partnership with DMV, military and transportation-related businesses. This new program streamlines the Commercial Drivers License (CDL) application process; waives road skills test; and eliminates the need to provide commercial motor vehicles for military members who currently possess a military license to operate similar vehicles.
 - d. A presentation by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on *Hiring Our Heroes*. The program objective is to find employment for 500,000 veterans by the end of 2013. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce developed its Fast Track Program to provide critical paths to meaningful careers and guide veterans and transitioning service members to make informed decisions about education and employment opportunities. *Hiring Our Heroes* will partner with dozens of major employers who successfully meet the criteria of a pre-determined Fast Track in identified localities and are committed to hiring veterans.
 - e. A presentation on the “*Virginia Values Veterans (V3)*” program sponsored by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. The V3 program goal is re-capitalizing the Virginia workforce by teaching companies how to hire veterans and then tracking the business impact of re-capitalizing the workforce with veterans to give others the courage to hire and retain veterans.
 - f. An interactive presentation and meeting with the Department of Defense (DoD) representatives for the military health insurance program, Tricare.
 - g. A presentation and discussion with the senior DoD officials developing the revised military TAPs GPS program.

Conclusion:

Over the past year, the VMAC has continued to work together on legislative agenda and quality of life issues that benefited service members and their families. The Council continues to foster a collaborative working environment with military leadership with the Commonwealth and the Office of the Governor. Over the years, the benefits to the military community have excelled and have remained extremely valuable. As potential Department of Defense cuts for the future may negatively impact the Commonwealth, it is critical to maintain this valuable line of communication with military leaders in the Commonwealth.